

In short the volume gives an excellent snapshot of current research on ‘Western’ Manichaeism. The absence of any major study of the Greek Cologne Mani-Codex is strongly felt as this miniaturized parchment-codex did more than any text to bridge Manichaean and Patristic Studies in the last quarter of a century. Perhaps it will feature prominently in the next conference on ‘Manichaeism and Early Christianity’.

ROBINSON COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE

SAMUEL N. C. LIEU

The Virgin Mary in Byzantium, c. 400–1000. Hymns, homilies and hagiography. By Mary B. Cunningham. Pp. xii + 275. Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. £19.99 (paper). 978 1 009 32725 1
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Decades of scholarly research have gone into the shaping of this important book, and it makes a very significant library shelf companion to the earlier volume of studies also edited by Mary Cunningham in association with Leslie Brubaker, in the *Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies* series (*The cult of the mother of God in Byzantium*, Abingdon 2011). This time, the clarity of a single author and the significantly cheaper price make it a very attractive buy. Mary Cunningham focuses here on the copious liturgical materials relating to the Blessed Virgin from the first six centuries of Byzantine culture; namely, church hymns to the *Theotokos* (with chapters on both the patristic and medieval periods), homilies in her praise, as well as panegyrics and civic intercessions. Miracle tales in which the Virgin appears and acts are also considered, insofar as these too had a liturgical function, being a feature of public readings at the many annual festivals of the Virgin’s liturgical cult in Constantinople and elsewhere. Apocalypses of the Virgin make an interesting appearance too, for this society, which has been so often dismissed in the past, in a clichéd manner, as ossified and static in its mentality, remained well and truly eschatological in ways that early modern Christianity onwards failed even to recognise. The texts are generously cited but, overall, this is a sustained set of critical commentaries on the major Marian literature of the Byzantine Church. This will surely be a book that will henceforth be essential reading for all who deal with this field, either in Byzantine history or in historical theology.

The literature, Cunningham concludes, tends to present Mary in three iconic forms: the first is her role as described in the great *Akathistos hymn* as *Hypermachos Strategos*, or great warrior-general, to whom the inhabitants of the New Rome were honour-bound to chant *Niketeria*, or ‘songs of victory’. Almost from the outset the Christians of Constantinople ousted the customary *Tyche* of an ancient city and replaced her with the image of Mary, a warrior of heavenly might who thus also displaced Athena’s lingering influence in the late fourth century. In her second role, as shown by the assembly of these texts, Mary is celebrated as the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God who gave birth to the Word Incarnate with the tenderness any family could understand. In this role she validated the Christology of the Orthodox Church, insisting on Jesus’ divine singularity of person. When Nestorius demurred at such a title for a human being Cyril of

Alexandria famously replied: ‘If Mary is not the Mother of God, then the one who is born from her is not truly God.’ Her title thus became the cipher and fundament for conciliar theology after Ephesus 431. *Theotokos* also served, of course, to displace the goddess who had earlier borne that acclamation as well (as mother of the god Horus) and as filling the *role* of protector of women, namely Isis. Mary, as the Byzantines acclaimed her, was no mere passive recipient of honours, she was an active and aggressively successful evangelist, vigorously elbowing away some of the most attractive and family-friendly cults of the late antique world. The third focal aspect of the texts studied here betrays the hands of the (mainly) monastic authors and preachers: it depicts her in the unusual guise (at least for the West) of an ascetic disciple of Christ. The theme of ‘first disciple’ is already visible in the New Testament texts (despite some resistance there too, especially in Mark) but the idea that her virginity was not merely accidental but an embraced choice and a model for later male celibates and female virgins, was very important to the many monastic communities that formed an important literary class in Byzantium. That approach has roots as early as second-century Christian Syria, and that Syrian influence remained enduringly important in Byzantine liturgical styles and ascetical history.

The reviews of such major pieces as the *Akathistos* Hymn and the works of Romanos Melodos alone make this a study worth having, but they are simply typical of all the studies comprising the book, which all carefully assess the previous scholarly literature, and advance new considerations based upon first-hand and deeply attentive engagement with the materials. The section on the Marian verses that abundantly adorn the various offices of the eastern Church is also a rare and profound contribution. It will be a text that will prove invaluable in an array of higher degree classes. All in all, this is a major work that sets a very high standard and forms a fitting capstone to a long and rich scholarly career.

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY,
OXFORD

JOHN ANTHONY MCGUCKIN

Venantius Fortunatus and Gallic Christianity. Theology in the writings of an Italian émigré in Merovingian Gaul. By Benjamin Wheaton. (The Early Middle Ages, 29.)

Pp. x + 293. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2022. €109.978 90 04 52194 0; 1878 4879

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Wheaton’s *Venantius Fortunatus* differs from the man who is portrayed in many modern studies of the Merovingian period. In those he is ‘the Italian poet’ who won success in the Austrasian court circle and whose Latin poetry provides many glimpses of Merovingian society. He is also the friend and *protégé* of Gregory of Tours, and the ‘prurient male hagiographer’ who has been credited with the coining of the term *torrix* to describe Queen Radegund, founder of the convent of Sainte-Croix in Poitiers, in her extremes of ascetic practice.

Certainly, the poems and *Vita Radegundis*, as well as Fortunatus’ *Vita sancti Martini*, are very well known and have been thoroughly quarried for portraits of individuals, descriptions of buildings and his liturgical hymns (such as *Pange lingua* and *Vexilla regis prodeunt*). Wheaton convincingly exposes another important aspect of Fortunatus’ career and writings. In focusing on Fortunatus’ contributions